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Implementation of the pilot project on the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

As a result of requests contained in General Assembly resolutions 56/64 B of 24 December 2001 and 57/130 B of 11 December 2002 regarding the implementation of the United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity, the Department of Public Information commissioned a survey on the estimated worldwide audience for United Nations Radio programmes in all six official languages, plus Portuguese. Representing a snapshot of listenership as at November 2002, and carried out with the active participation of 180 partner stations, the survey estimates conservatively that more than 133 million people listen to United Nations Radio at least once a week. The results of the survey are broken down in the report by language and region. The report emphasizes that building partnerships with local, regional and national broadcasters worldwide continues to be a priority factor for ensuring the continued expansion of United Nations Radio outreach. While the digital divide is a constraint on expanding and improving the dissemination of programmes in some regions, the report concludes that, due to its universal reach and cost-effectiveness, radio remains the most potent means of communication for the United Nations, particularly in developing countries.

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I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 49 of its resolution 56/64 B of 24 December 2001, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General "to submit a report on the implementation of the United Nations international radio broadcasting capacity to the Committee on Information at its twenty-fifth session, including information that can be obtained from the local, national and regional radio partners about the estimated number of listeners reached, in order for the Committee to decide on the future of this capacity". The following year, in paragraph 55 of its resolution 57/130 B of 11 December 2002, the General Assembly reiterated this request, and asked in addition for information on "the cost-effectiveness of radio as an instrument in United Nations activities". The present report has been prepared in response to those requests.

II. Results of an in-depth survey

2. The Department of Public Information engaged an independent consultant to conduct a survey on the estimated worldwide audience for United Nations Radio programmes in all six official languages, plus Portuguese. This in-depth survey was carried out from September to November 2002 through partner stations worldwide, and it has revealed a number of encouraging trends:

- Utilizing a measure commonly used by broadcasters, the survey estimates conservatively that more than 133 million people listen to United Nations Radio at least once a week in one of the six official languages of the Organization or Portuguese.
- The actual weekly audience for United Nations Radio is in fact higher than the survey figure, which does not cover affiliate radio stations of partner broadcasters that pass on to them United Nations Radio material, nor stations transmitting by short wave or satellite (listenership figures could not be estimated for either of these categories).
- Such extensive outreach in all regions of the world, in seven languages and with a weekly audience of well over 133 million, is possible only because of the universality and cost-effectiveness of the medium of radio. The international broadcasting capacity that made this possible is achieved with the relatively small investment of the additional $2.4 million provided to the Department of Public Information by Member States per biennium.
- The survey was carried out with the active participation of 180 partner stations, with a remarkable 94 per cent providing the required information. Many of the participating partner stations are major national broadcasters, a clear indication of worldwide interest in United Nations Radio broadcasts.
- Responses from client stations indicate that the daily United Nations Radio feeds provide a valuable service, supplying material not available from other news sources. For example, many radio stations — including national broadcasters — find it difficult to cover some crucial international stories with the authority and scope the stories require. United Nations Radio provides range and depth of coverage, including regional focus and regional voices. As

the public voice of the United Nations, United Nations Radio speaks with unique authority on matters that are before the Organization.

- The survey represents a snapshot of listenership as at November 2002. Technological factors constitute a constraint on United Nations Radio's further fulfilment of its potential. This is particularly manifested in the continuing heavy dependence on transmitting programmes through the telephone, a system that both holds back United Nations Radio's ability to expand its services and limits the flexibility of stations receiving the material. Efforts being made by the international community to help bridge the digital divide, specifically by increasing broadcasters' access to satellite and Internet technology, will help to overcome such limitations.

III. Methodology of the survey

3. The principal source of information for the survey was direct and extensive telephone contact with partner stations that receive United Nations Radio programmes in the six official languages, as well as in Portuguese. Each station was asked to complete a detailed questionnaire. Figures obtained from these questionnaires were carefully checked against data on radio ownership, known listening patterns, published surveys in relevant territories and commercially conducted surveys (specifically those carried out by the British Broadcasting Corporation and by Intermedia, an independent radio research company) to develop an information matrix from which an estimate of likely audience levels for United Nations Radio materials could be derived. In a few cases, partner stations had conducted their own authoritative surveys, the results of which were used for this study.

4. United Nations Radio supplied a list of 180 broadcasting stations, 94 per cent of which provided the requested information in full. Given the normal rate of return for such questionnaires, with even 25 per cent considered acceptable, this is a clear reflection of the active and close working relationship between United Nations Radio and its partner stations, as well as the stations' continuing interest in receiving the programmes. Stations provided information on either their per day or per week listenership. The figures in the present report are therefore given on one or the other of these bases. The total figure is an amalgam of the daily and weekly figures, as the survey method ensured that there was no overlap between the two methods.

5. It is important to note that there are constraints on all public broadcasters in seeking to estimate audience figures, in view of the considerable costs associated with detailed market research, as a result of which even global broadcasting giants are limited in terms of the scope of a survey. The stations were split between the 129 that use the daily 15-minute transmission from United Nations Radio on a regular basis, either in its entirety or in part, and the 51 stations that used United Nations Radio material on a less regular basis. It is important to point out that only the former were used in determining the audience figures for United Nations Radio.

6. In the survey, a fundamental approach of caution was taken in estimating listenership, and the statistical practice of underestimating conservatively was used where estimates were necessary.

IV. Results of radio station-based survey: breakdown by language and region

7. The survey showed that United Nations Radio in the six official languages has 112 active partner radio stations that use our materials on a regular basis, either in their daily news programmes or in weekly magazine programmes. By language, the number of stations is as follows:

Arabic: 11

Chinese: 8

English: 24

French: 23

Russian: 6

Spanish: 40

In addition to the six official languages, United Nations Radio's daily five-minute news bulletins in Portuguese are broadcast on 17 partner stations.

8. The estimated audience figures for partner station broadcasts, by region, are as follows (not including listenership via short wave, satellite or other means of transmission):

Region	*Estimated audience*
North America	920 000
South America	36 855 400
Caribbean	1 521 000
Sub-Saharan Africa	26 299 750
Middle East and North Africa	3 596 000
Europe, including the Commonwealth of Independent States	41 806 000
Asia and the Pacific	22 265 000
Total	**133 263 150**

9. Below is a language-by-language breakdown of the main results of the survey. In addition, an indication is given of where there is a significant, though not specifically estimated, audience for short wave or satellite broadcasts. As noted above, in all regions there are also a number of stations that transmit United Nations Radio material on a less frequent basis, or for which it was not possible to gather survey data. No estimates for listenership for these stations are provided, though such audiences are hearing United Nations Radio material as well.

1. Arabic

10. Eleven stations in 11 countries and territories use United Nations Radio material, for which the likely total daily audience is conservatively estimated at some 3 million. This includes an estimated daily listenership of 502,000 on Radio Algeria and of 339,000 on Radio Tunisia, as well as a combined estimated

listenership of 300,000 per day on Radio Free Lebanon and Radio Abu Dhabi. In addition, United Nations Radio in Arabic is carried to North Africa and the Middle East via satellite by Merlin Communications and by ArabSat. ArabSat carries United Nations Radio as part of the package it delivers to major Middle East broadcasters, including Al-Jazeera. No audience estimates are available for these satellite-based broadcasts.

2. Chinese

11. Based on the survey results, a conservative estimate of the audience for the Chinese programme is that 20 million people a week hear United Nations Radio on China National Radio and 1.6 million listen weekly to East Radio-Shanghai. Apart from the weekly audiences, there is a daily audience of 600,000 listeners on Radio-Beijing alone. The Chinese programme is also heard by an estimated 165,000 people on specialist stations in Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America.

3. English

12. United Nations Radio's English language programmes are heard across several continents, but particularly in Africa. In Nigeria, nearly 11 million listeners are able to hear the United Nations programmes via the main State broadcaster, the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria. In Sierra Leone, 2 million people listen to United Nations Radio daily, both on the national broadcaster, Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service, and via the special and popular United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) station, Radio UNAMSIL, which has country-wide reach. In Zambia, United Nations Radio's daily programme is live on the evening news on the National Broadcasting Corporation's stations, with an estimated weekly audience of 1 million to 2 million.

13. Also in Africa, Channel Africa — the external service of the South African Broadcasting Corporation — carries United Nations Radio in three languages, including English. It has considerable reach across the continent through the use of its own partner stations, on short wave and via the Internet. Channel Africa's conservative audience figures indicate more than 750,000 listeners a week in English, which are not included in the survey results.

14. In the Caribbean, United Nations Radio's English programmes are broadcast on stations in the Bahamas, Guyana, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, and Grenada. The Guyana Broadcasting Corporation, for example, which uses United Nations Radio material at peak times, reaches an estimated 70,000 listeners daily with United Nations Radio programmes. In the United States, the Black Radio Network carries United Nations Radio programmes on its 168 client stations.

4. French

15. Twenty-three stations in 19 countries use United Nations Radio's French language programmes. Africa is the prime target for the French programmes, with more than 1 million weekly listeners just for the very popular Africa No. 1, which is based in the capital of Gabon, Libreville. In Mali 300,000 listeners a week are able to hear United Nations Radio via Radio Kledu. In North Africa, Radio Morocco uses United Nations Radio programmes at peak times, with an estimated daily audience of 980,000. In Chad, the national broadcaster, which reaches more than 5 million

people daily, uses United Nations Radio news items in its evening and late-night news programmes, with the United Nations Radio audience estimated at nearly 200,000 listeners. Channel Africa also broadcasts United Nations Radio's French programmes, with an estimated weekly audience of approximately 500,000. Again, this is in addition to the estimated listenership derived from the survey.

16. Radio Tropicale, based in New York, broadcasts United Nations Radio on its New York and Haitian stations and reaches more than 1.3 million people a week.

5. Russian

17. Forty million listeners a week hear the United Nations Radio Russian programmes on The Voice of Russia, which broadcasts them at peak times, to all countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Belarus National Radio-Channel 1, a relatively new partner, adds an estimated 1.4 million more listeners. United Nations Radio programmes are also heard by Russian-language listeners on stations in Estonia, Finland and even the city of Chicago in the United States.

6. Spanish

18. United Nations Radio in Spanish covers more than 40 stations in 18 countries in Central and Latin America. Among the larger partners is Radio Nacional Argentina, which has 2 million listeners a day for United Nations Radio programmes. In Guatemala, another 1 million people listen to United Nations Radio through Radio Sonora. Radio Nacional de Paraguay has up to 740,000 listeners daily. In Mexico, United Nations Radio items are broadcast via seven major networks that have their own affiliate stations across that country. These networks have an estimated listenership of almost 10 million per day.

7. Portuguese

19. United Nations Radio also produces a daily five-minute news bulletin in Portuguese. On average, these bulletins reach an estimated weekly audience of 27 million listeners in Europe, Latin America and Africa, with the bulk of the listenership in Brazil. In addition, Channel Africa carries United Nations Radio's Portuguese programmes, with an estimated weekly listenership of more than 750,000.

20. It should be noted that United Nations Radio's Portuguese bulletin is not officially part of the current Live Radio Project and that the short (five-minute) duration of its daily programme makes it a totally different product from that produced by the six official language units, all of which send 15 minutes of material to their clients every day.

V. Additional listenership

21. As already indicated, the actual listenership for United Nations Radio is estimated to be in excess of the 133 million derived from the survey results alone. It has not been possible to include audiences of affiliate stations of United Nations Radio partner broadcasters, for example. In countries such as Mexico, where partner stations have a number of affiliates receiving United Nations materials from them,

this audience can be significant. In addition to those stations reporting regular use of United Nations Radio material, some 51 other stations use United Nations material on a basis that ranges from semi-regularly to occasionally. There are a number of reasons why these stations do not use United Nations Radio programmes more regularly, including station-based issues, technical problems in receiving materials on a regular basis and editorial decisions on content. Such stations are receiving priority attention in the Department of Public Information's ongoing promotion and marketing work for United Nations Radio (see sect. VI below).

22. Satellite and short wave broadcasters, as already discussed above, are another example of successful outreach, which represents a significant daily and weekly audience in many parts of the world. The English and French programmes, for example, are broadcast daily by World Radio Network (WRN), a London-based company that has gathered together a large number of public radio networks that place their programmes on its satellites so that they can broadcast each other's material. Major member broadcasters include Deutsche Welle, Radio Netherlands, Radio Australia, RTE Ireland, Radio Polonia, Radio Canada International, RVI Flanders International and many more. United Nations Radio is carried by WRN's three satellites covering Europe, Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East, Africa and North and South America. WRN maintains a regular, advertised schedule and has weekly updates for all its partner stations and networks. However, it does not maintain audience figures for the stations that download its transmissions; this would require separate surveys.

23. In addition to WRN, Merlin Communications' satellites, available in Africa and the Middle East, carry United Nations Radio's English, French and Arabic broadcasts. They reach listeners by short wave. CCN en Español, a major international service, carries United Nations Radio Spanish programmes to 150 stations in Latin America and 100 in the United States. China Radio International and ArabSat also carry many United Nations Radio features, but again it is impossible to estimate the audience numbers without separate surveys being conducted.

24. United Nations Radio also reaches its audience via the Internet. For each of the six official languages and Portuguese, there are web pages that include the text of the news stories and summaries of the features of the day. Visitors to the web pages can listen to the programme; free downloads of audio software are available. The growing outreach of the Internet is shown, for example, by the frequent references to United Nations Radio's Russian programmes on web sites located in many countries of the CIS, including the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.

25. Ideally, individual surveys should be carried out to determine the estimated audience figures for all the short wave, Internet and satellite-delivered systems. The costs, however, would be extremely high, and in fact are the principal deterrent preventing even many major commercial stations from undertaking such a project.

VI. Ensuring continued expansion of United Nations Radio outreach

26. Building partnerships with local, regional and national broadcasters worldwide continues to be a priority for the department vis-à-vis the development of an international radio broadcasting capacity for the United Nations. In February, three Spanish-language radio stations became our newest partners: Radio Indautxu in Spain and Radio America AM 1220 and Radio Stereo Sol FM 107.1, both in Nicaragua.

27. United Nations Radio is building a higher profile on the Internet through active cooperation with the United Nations News Centre, the third most visited page on the United Nations web site, supplying interviews and linking to the News Centre's page. In turn, the News Centre links to specific audio stories on the United Nations Radio pages, as appropriate. The expansion of the News Centre into more of the official languages will increase the synergy between it and United Nations Radio. Much of the material for the four new pages will be based on radio news stories in the respective languages. The News Centre in Arabic was inaugurated on 31 January 2003. This will soon be followed by Spanish, Russian and Chinese pages. As these new web pages establish themselves as regular parts of the News Centre, it is expected that the number of daily hits for the News Centre and radio pages will increase rapidly.

28. The need to expand United Nations Radio's client base will continue to be central to the efforts of the Department of Public Information to increase the interest of news organizations and the media and their access to up-to-date news and other information about the Organization and its activities, and thereby to reach many more people around the world. Specifically, renewed efforts will be directed towards Asia, where there is great potential. As part of its promotional efforts, the Department is exploring a number of possible initiatives, including coordinated telemarketing to cultivate new clients; an electronic newsletter with updated information on the Department's radio programming and its radio station partners; and more regular participation in relevant major international meetings and conferences of broadcasters to promote United Nations Radio programmes and the other products of the Department. An important element of this strategy is focusing on expanding the number of partners in developed countries.

29. The introduction of the new integrated and automated news-gathering and production capacity, with desktop audio editing, work on which gets under way this year, will also considerably strengthen the Department's capacity to provide broadcasters with material more rapidly and more flexibly. The planned modernization and upgrading of the United Nations International Broadcasting Centre with digital technology will also greatly facilitate the dissemination of the radio programmes to client stations.

30. The geographical and linguistic spread of the daily United Nations Radio programmes is comprehensive. The survey confirmed, however, that this reach would be greater were it not for the digital divide, as mentioned above, which severely hampers distribution in some regions. Many stations, particularly in Africa, continue to receive daily transmissions through the telephone, and they confirmed through the survey the unreliability and difficulties they often face by using this method. Receiving material via a file transfer protocol through the Internet

immensely improves the transmission of radio programmes, with a consequent increase in audio quality that will be appreciated by their listeners. In this regard, continued efforts by Member States to help close the digital divide are directly relevant to the Department's efforts to improve and expand its radio services to clients in many regions of the world.

VII. Conclusion

31. Given its universal reach, as well as its cost-effectiveness, radio remains the most potent means of communication for the United Nations, particularly in developing countries. The daily news broadcasts have revolutionized the approach of the Organization in reaching its global constituencies. The encouragement and, often, practical assistance of Member States have enabled the United Nations to successfully tap the inherent potential of this medium. Indeed, as the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information has said, the programmes of United Nations Radio have served "to open up the Organization, to make its work more transparent and to give it a local voice, which is the aim of all our information activities".

32. The active participation and the figures provided by partner stations in the survey indicate the great demand for authoritative news broadcasts emanating from the United Nations. This is immensely gratifying, as is the fact that some 133 million listeners around the globe hear United Nations material at least once a week. Clearly, if all partner stations, as well as short wave broadcasters, satellite networks and affiliated stations, were surveyed, the weekly audience for United Nations Radio material would increase by many millions of listeners. In addition, it is important to point out that United Nations Radio regularly receives letters from listeners all over the world passionately expressing their appreciation of its programmes.

33. A firm mandate from Member States to continue this international broadcasting capacity will ensure that radio continues to contribute, cost-effectively, to the overall goal of the Department of Public Information, namely, to generate understanding about the United Nations and all the priority issues and concerns that Member States of the Organization have said the world must be informed about.